



By Anastasia Pryanikova, M.A., J.D.

Rewire Your Brain to Speak Your Mind: Neuroscience Insights for Conflict Management

Every conflict contains a seed that in the right conditions can germinate into a new understanding, deeper awareness, and creative possibilities. The inner workings of the brain can advance or hinder this process. This workshop will explore implications of current neuroscience research for communication, social interactions, conflict management, and influence. You will gain insight into the science of neuroplasticity, mirror neurons, emotional regulation, decision-making, and creative problem-solving as you stock your toolbox with brain-friendly conflict resolution strategies.

This program will help you more effectively:

- Communicate and think clearly under pressure.
- Regulate emotions.
- Overcome cognitive biases and improve decision-making.
- Unleash the creative potential in conflicts and facilitate insights and breakthroughs.

SUMMARY

The brain on autopilot. The brain is wired to conserve energy and resources, look for patterns and automate them. Our behaviors, emotional memories, physical reactions become part of our subconscious brain maps, which are automatic and not easy to change.

However, recent research in the field of neuroscience indicates that we are continuously producing new brain cells and create new pathways in our brain throughout life. The brain's ability to rewire itself as a result of experience is called neuroplasticity. If you don't mindfully direct the changes in your brain, something or someone will accidentally do it for you.

Brains at war. Our brains are social. We have a special set of neurons, called "mirror" neurons, to help us with our human connections. Neuroscientists are exploring whether the mirror neuron system in the brain is linked to empathy and enables us to better understand other people's intentions, feelings, and emotions.

The emotional brain is the puppeteer in the theater of the mind, the rational brain is the puppet that believes it can decide on its own. How we act in a conflict often depends on the outcome of the power battle between our rational mind and the emotional brain. If the threat is perceived to be too big, our emotional brain takes over and dampens the work of the rational mind. Our emotional brain sends out stress signals and floods the body with cortisol, triggering the fight-or-flight response. That's how our mind "freezes." The brain sends a signal that we don't need to waste time and energy on thinking, we need to be prepared to act. When we are in the negative state of mind, we develop a tunnel vision that doesn't allow us to see opportunities. That's when we either become aggressive or defensive, we attack or withdraw.

Psychologists have known for a long time that negative emotions are so salient and effective in seizing our attention because our survival has depended on them. It is not just physical threats that trigger our brains, but also uncertainty, social isolation, and unfairness.



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Brain infusions for creative conflict management.

Every conflict contains a seed that in the right conditions can germinate into a new understanding, deeper awareness, and creative possibilities. Neuroplasticity enables us to change our unproductive responses to stress and conflict.

Emotional regulation leads to better interactions, personal power and self-care, as well as emotional resilience. Positive emotions tend to broaden our focus, enabling us to discover more tools and solutions to life's challenges and ultimately making us more resourceful. Practices that help us cultivate a positive outlook on life include meditation, journaling, labeling negative emotions, and reframing.

Rituals and symbols captivate our brains, which are wired to look for patterns and make predictions even where none exist. The belief anchored in a symbolic object may cause you to perform better because the power of suggestion makes the brain respond as if it were true, triggering a placebo effect. Similarly, a ritual is a set of actions that has a special symbolic meaning. Rituals give a signal to your brain to prepare for something or shift focus, depending on the meaning and purpose of your ritual.

Metaphors often reflect the interplay between our physical world and our thinking. Our social perceptions can be shaped by our physical experiences and the attributes of our environment. For instance, you can give a “cold shoulder” or a “warm welcome.” It turns out that social rejection can actually make people feel cold. When you attempted to avert a wrong and it continues anyway, you may state, “I wash my hands of the issue,” indicating that you are clean and not to blame. Incidentally, people who feel physically clean appear less judgmental.

Storytelling connects minds. Nothing captivates a human brain more than a good story. Stories engage us on the emotional level. Experiences accompanied by strong emotions are more memorable. When the story resonates with the listener, the brains of the speaker and listener may synchronize, suggesting a deeper human connection.

Movement fuels thinking. Think on your feet, literally. Your body often reveals what the brain tries to conceal, so listen to your body. Let your body guide you when you need to make a decision. If you experience muscle tension, a “pit” in stomach, or a sudden headache, perhaps, your body is telling you that you are moving in a wrong direction.

Play delights the brain. Play can relax the brain and make it easier for us to take risks and experiment. Play prepares us for the unexpected and can produce a more diverse repertory of behavior. When we play, a part of the brain that is involved in self-restraint and evaluation – the inner critic – is powered down, allowing for a fuller expression. Through role playing, we can put ourselves into different kinds of experiences, learn to better understand other perspectives, and cultivate empathy. Play is a way to boost creativity, imagination, and decision-making.

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PRESENTER



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